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ABSTRACT

In the author's view, the first step in solving college orientation problems is to assess the character of the campus. Orientation personnel interested in designing a useful program should note: (1) the size of the school; (2) whether the institution is primarily commuter or residential; (3) the size of the budget; (4) the degree of faculty and student involvement; (5) how receptive other campus offices are to innovations and changes in the orientation program; and (6) what kinds of students attend the school. A great deal of emphasis is placed on the success of facilitating productive interaction among persons crucial to the orientation program. Several aspects of the program at the University of Florida are highlighted: (1) the Summer Orientation Program; (2) the Student Volunteer Program; and (3) the Teacher-Counselor Program. All are shown to "fit" the character of the campus. It is felt that a truly successful program will include students in the planning. Six recommendations from students attending the National Orientation Directors Conference conclude the paper. (TL)

INNOVATIONS IN FRESHMAN ORIENTATION

The word innovation sounds nice, and is really overworked. To put it in simple terms, innovation means something different, something new that you haven't tried before. Today, I would like to give you some of my feelings about orientation and also describe a couple of programs that I feel are working, at least on our campus at the University of Florida.

I've seen on occasions that people will attend meetings such as this expecting to find answers to their orientation problems on their respective campuses. I really don't think that I have any sure-fire solutions to problems that you may be having on your campus. All I intend to do is to share with you what some of my feelings are about orientation and what we have tried to do for our students.

I don't think that you're going to find any solution to your problems until you have established what the character of the campus that you are from is. I feel it is extremely necessary to become very knowledgeable about your institution as well as the personalities within it. My experience has shown me that it has been almost a requirement to get to know the personalities within each office on my campus and to establish a relationship in which you are able to discuss problems openly and to be able to compromise on solutions.

I don't think that it is any secret that each campus is extremely different. I have found that around the country orientation is handled by many different offices. On some campuses

2. it is the Admissions Office; on other campuses it is directed by the Student Union; it is handled by the counseling center; it is handled by the Dean of Men or the Dean of Women's Office. At the University of Florida I am an Assistant Dean for Student Development and I have the responsibility of directing the orientation program. I definitely feel that it makes a great deal of difference as to which office on the campus is handling an orientation program in relationship to the amount of cooperation that you get on a university-wide scale.

I think that your orientation program depends a lot on the size of the university or college that you represent. I feel that if you come from a very small campus, you are able to do a great deal more things than those people that come from large institutions.

A very important item in setting up your orientation program is the fact of whether you are a commuter college or a residential institution. The University of Florida would be considered a residential university since approximately half of our students live in the residence halls, we have what you might consider a captive audience; and we are able to provide a very good orientation program for them.

An item that is very dear to all of us is what kind of a budget do you have for carrying on an orientation program. I have talked to some directors who have eight to ten thousand dollars designated as funds that they can use for orientation programs. Then again, I have talked with other people who have very little money budgeted for them, and they put together a program with good will and wishes.

3. Another very important question in relating to the orientation program is how involved are the faculty and students used on committees and programs? I feel the more people that you can get involved, the more people you can count on when it comes time for putting on a program, or appropriating money for projects that you may have in mind.

How receptive are other offices on your campus to innovations or changes in orientation programs? It has been my experience that when you are dealing with offices such as the Registrar's Office, the Student Health Service, Student Accounts, the Housing Office, and offices of this nature, that each one of these offices many times are only interested in how orientation and registration effects them. Sometimes they do not see the problem from an overall point of view.

How well do you know your in-coming students? This past September our campus was not at all prepared for the students that showed up. Many people commented as the freshmen were checking in that this group of students looked and acted as though they had been on campus for six months. They seemed older; they talked older; and they dressed like our returning students do. For another example, we generally have approximately four to five thousand students attend the President's Welcome; this past year only four hundred students showed up. In asking the students why they chose not to come, the reply in most cases was that in high school this past year they were given the option as to whether they wanted to attend a lecture or not, and they felt that the President's Welcome was just another lecture, and they didn't need to go. I have since found this to be true on other campuses this past fall. We are currently re-evaluating whether we will have another President's Welcome or not at the University of Florida.

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I think only after considering these previous questions that I have raised should you then try a new or different program. I hope that during the course of this meeting today that you are able to pick up more of the concepts rather than the specific techniques of getting the job done. As I mentioned before, in talking with other Orientation Directors at different institutions, there are no two programs alike and I don't think that they should be.

The personalities that are involved on your individual campuses are so important in bringing together on orientation program. I have felt several times very successful just bringing together the people from the various offices on this campus and having them agree on matters pertaining to orientation. I have had only one meeting in my four years as Director of Orientation where all members left the meeting and were communicating with one another, and that was my last committee meeting. I really feel it has been a major achievement to have our various offices talking with one another, let alone putting on a program for students.

I think four years ago when I started my position as Director of Orientation, I knew more about orientation than I do today. I probably have become more and more confused when it comes to planning programs for orientation. I have scheduled programs which have met no one's needs but my own. So after trimming the fat from our orientation program over the past few years, there is really nothing left. I am almost at the point where I could suggest not having a Fall Orientation Program. One of the biggest problems that I have found with a Fall Orientation Program is that when the students come to campus, they are deluged with various forces pulling on them. The Greeks are putting great pressure on them to pledge or to rush a fraternity or sorority; the Student Union is trying to get students to sign up for their programs and to take memberships in their clubs and organizations; the residence halls are

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trying to start their programs; and the student is just excited about being on campus. But there is really not too much that can be accomplished during those few days before classes start. If they are in meetings, they rarely come away with very much information. I can say this only because we have a very successful Summer Registration Program.

Our Summer Orientation Program allows us to bring the students with their parents to our campus during the summer term for a two-day period where we are able to spend a great deal of time with them in advising, talking with them, letting the students talk with currently enrolled students, and having discussions with parents, touring campus, buying books, and so forth. Our Summer Program has always been very successful and we feel that more information is being communicated during the Summer Orientation than during the Fall Orientation.

One factor in our Freshman Orientation Program that has helped us a great deal is that of having a limited enrollment. Our freshman class has been 2,800 students for the past few years. We know exactly how many students to prepare for. On an average 85% of our freshman class attend our Early Registration Program held during the summer. The other 15% is then registered during the fall registration.

When the students start class in September, we have two programs going for us: The first is a Student Volunteer Program which is based in the residence halls since our freshmen are required to live in the residence halls. 250 returning students have been selected by their peers the previous Spring and have also been interviewed by a professional housing counselor. The volunteers are then assigned to various rooms through-out our residence halls. They are responsible

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for 12 to 15 in-coming freshmen which they meet at the time of check in. Some people view them as big brothers and big sisters.

All the students who are volunteer leaders are enrolled in a one quarter, three-credit hour, junior level education course in Personnel Services. This is the first course that has been designed to let those students try out their skills of helping other students while under professional supervision. It is really like an internship or a practicum, since each one has responsibility for a group of students. The volunteers are required to attend a one-hour lecture per week which are given by the heads of the various helping services on campus. The volunteers are required to meet with their assigned students a minimum of one hour a week, whether it be on a one-to-one situation or on a group basis. They are also in a one hour supervised meeting per week with a professional housing counselor discussing what is actually happening in the groups. The course is flexible enough so that they can zero in on current campus problems.

One of the more concrete examples of how this course works is that in past years we would have a lecture given explaining the helping services available on campus. One part that was covered was the reading clinic. We would tell the students that if they had a reading problem, they should go there. Well, the new students had not been to class yet, so how could they tell if they had a reading problem. With our current program the volunteers are able to discuss problems with the students as they arise and tell them how to get help. We find that students are getting help from the helping services much earlier in the quarter than they ever have before. Even though this volunteer program is a one-term program, the relationships that have been established, in many cases, have been continued all year.

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Another program that we have which we feel is extremely successful is our Teacher-Counselor Program. Almost all of our freshmen are enrolled in a Logic course their first year, and the main emphasis, along with the Logic, is to get to know the student. The instructors of this course are selected according to their academic background and their feelings about students and their desire to help students. These Teacher-Counselors are given time to spend with students- counseling and advising them. The Logic course is a three-term course, so that the student has an option to spend a full year with one teacher-counselor. The course is arranged so that one third of the time is spent talking about current issues such as drug abuse, draft, vocational choice, marriage, values in live.

In many cases the counselor in the residence halls teaches one section of this course. The students are assigned to the counselor's dorm, so that the student sees the housing counselor as a teacher also. It is also a chance for the housing counselor to get into the academic circles on campus. The Teacher-Counselor concept is described in greater detail by Dr. Alan Dahms, in the March, 1971, issue of the American Personnel and Guidance Journal. I have found that the faculty teaching in this course can always be counted upon in supporting any type of program which deals with orientation. If all of our professors could operate with the philosophy that is present in the Teacher-Counselor, I really think there would be less need for people like myself; however, there would still be a co-ordinating aspect for the entire campus, but I am sure the job of orientation would be a lot easier.

I am sure there are other programs around the country accomplishing just what we are in Florida. Our program is a long way from perfect, and we must keep updating it continuously. The best way to do this is

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to involve students as much as possible. This is evident by the report that was given by the students that attended the National Orientation Directors Conference which was held on our campus last November.

Approximately 20 students attended from various colleges and universities around the country. These students met several times, then submitted the following report which I totally agree with. It has six recommendations which are:

- 1) We would like to see greater involvement in the planning and decision making regarding orientation programs, their funding, their administration. We believe that students and administrators should be equals in this regard and that they should perform their respective functions as responsible, interacting, trusting individuals.
- 2) We feel that there is a great need for new ideas and concepts in the field of Orientation. In order to determine the proper new paths, we must first of all obtain the reactions of those on whom Orientation has the greatest effect. We must seek the expectations of the entering new students and from this inquiry help determine their needs for Orientation. After directing our programs toward these needs we must determine their fecundity by obtaining the reactions of the new students to the orientation programs at their respective schools and colleges. Our rationale for this proposal is that these persons are the best equipped to determine the success of these programs and the effect which they have had on their lives.
- 3) We desire no longer to be isolated from the Administration. As was mentioned earlier, we desire--in fact we need, for the benefit of both parties--to be on an equal standing with the administrators with whom we are working on orientation programs. We strongly desire from

9. the administrators the benefit of their advising, their ideas, and their experience.

4) We are of the opinion that Orientation must not be merely a short-term proposition for a select group of individuals. We sense the need for year-long, on going orientation programs. Also, the need exists for greater emphasis on transfer student orientation. But most significant, orientation needs to lift its scope to include all students - not merely freshmen and transfers. This is the case as any time a vast number of "new" people enter the University Community, it is a new experience for all persons, not just the "new" ones.

5) We feel that there is a need for greater direction toward students at the National and Regional Orientation Directors' Conferences. As students are becoming more and more active in orientation programs, the need for the facilities to exchange ideas among students also increases.

6) Most important of all, we ask that all persons involved in orientation--faculty, administrators, and students--re-evaluate their stands and values regarding orientation. For nothing new and productive will come unless all people approach their work with new ideas and new energies.

I have tried to give you what some of my feelings about orientation are and a couple of suggestions of things that we are doing which we feel good about. I feel we should continue trying new approaches as I feel the people we are working with are continually changing. I have been told several times that the program I wanted to try would not work, but I tried them anyway. Sometimes they have worked, and sometimes they haven't. Even though some programs have

10) failed, we can say that we have tried. A great deal of creativity is needed in our work; we need to utilize all possible resources available to us. I feel a greater emphasis should be placed on audio-visual programs. Our in-coming students want to be stimulated visually and audiently. Long dry lectures are a sure way of killing our programs. We must talk on the same level with the students and not down to them. Orientation should be for the benefit of the students, not our benefit or the benefit of the egos of the university personnel.

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